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***Calls on State to Provide Energy Assistance to as Many Low Income Pennsylvanians as Possible***

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MEDIA, PA – In the midst of an economic downturn, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) urged Pennsylvania officials to ensure the greatest possible number of individuals would receive aid under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provides vital support to millions of families who cannot afford to heat their homes during the winter. The Congressman wrote to Secretary Estelle B. Richman of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, expressing concern about the proposed LIHEAP State Plan for Fiscal Year 2010, which anticipates only \$2.1 billion in federal funding for the program. (See attached letter.) However, the House of Representatives and the Senate Committee on Appropriations have passed bills funding the Federal LIHEAP block grant at \$5.1 billion an amount equal to the Fiscal Year 2009 level. The Congressman urge the Department to maintain LIHEAP access at the levels and durations implemented in Fiscal Year 2009.

“I am concerned that the Department of Public Welfares proposed LIHEAP State Plan for Fiscal Year 2010 would severely limit the availability of LIHEAP grants to Pennsylvanians,” said Congressman Sestak in his letter to Secretary Richman, which was also sent to Governor Ed Rendell. If implemented, the Plan will serve 18,647 fewer Pennsylvania households through crisis grants than the Fiscal Year 2009 Proposed Plan. Additionally, the FY2010 plan institutes an arbitrary maximum cash grant of \$1,000, falling short of Pennsylvania's needs.

"I am also troubled that the proposed plan would make cash grants available only between December 1, 2009 and January 3, 2010. In past years, the program was open from November through March. Limiting the open period puts any Pennsylvanian who loses their source of income during this period at risk of being unable to pay their heating bill. These changes make delinquency the only avenue to LIHEAP grants for Pennsylvania families in need.

"Working families, senior citizens, the disabled and young children are among those most dependent on LIHEAP assistance, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to assist low income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy, primarily in meeting their immediate home energy needs. Demand for support from the program has already been shown to outweigh funding levels. In 2008, only about half of the approximately 800,000 eligible homes received assistance."

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, the Congressman was the first Director of Deep Blue, the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the Global War on Terrorism. He served as President Clintons Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Congressman Sestak is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*